

Irrealis and clause linkage

Category: oral presentation

The realis/irrealis distinction has been traditionally analyzed within the scope of the proposition, considering the clause as the level in which the reality status of a given state of affairs is coded (e.g. potential, future, optative, etc.). However, the reality status of what is being uttered **may also be coded at the interclausal level**, i.e. through clause linkage strategies that establish at once a relation between two clauses and their reality values. In this paper, we will conduct a survey of the *interclausal functions* that irrealis markers may code, in order to make a typology of the attested cases and to identify possible regularities in cross-linguistic variation. There are at least two respects under which the connection between the realis/irrealis dimension and the coding of interclausal relations will be examined:

- 1) First of all, there are *portmanteau* markers which function as both realis/irrealis markers and clause linkers (cfr. Elliott 2000: 65; Mithun 1995: 368). Such markers encode not only the reality status of the proposition(s), but also other grammatical categories such as person and number of the subjects, switch-reference (different-subject ‘DS’ vs. same-subject ‘SS’), and/or specific semantic properties of the interclausal relation established (e.g. sequential vs. simultaneous combination, complementation). There is a great cross-linguistic variation in the functions that these irrealis portmanteau markers may express and in the scope they may have (they may impose a given reality status on both the linked clauses, on the first one or on the final one). Yet, no systematic exam of such phenomena has been undertaken yet.
 - a. There are languages in which **switch-reference markers** encode, besides the continuity vs. discontinuity of subjects, the reality vs. irrealis of the linked clauses. In Jamul Tiipay for instance, there is a set of switch-reference markers on realis dependent clauses (Miller 2001: 228), regardless of the reality status of the reference (main) clause (see ex. (1a)). A different set of switch-reference markers is found instead on dependent clauses which express unrealized events, provided that their reference clauses are irrealis too (see ex. (1b)). In Amele (Roberts 1990: 371ff.; see ex. (2)), on the other hand, the realis/irrealis distinction is marked only in simultaneous switch-reference markers and it signals the reality status of the reference clause. The realis/irrealis distinction on switch-reference markers is not infrequent in Papuan languages (Nobonob, Anjam, Bargam), although it does not show the same scope and it does not associate with the same functions in every language.
 - b. Realis and irrealis **complementizers** are another frequent case of portmanteau interclausal connectives encompassing the reality dimension. The use of different complementizers after verbs meaning ‘say’ or ‘know’ and verbs meaning ‘want’ is frequent in the languages of the Balkans: the opposition is attested in Modern Greek (*óti* R vs. *na* IRR), Macedonian (*deka/oti* R vs. *da* IRR), Romanian (*să* IRR vs. *că* R), and other languages of that area. These markers encode both a relation of complementation and the reality status of the complete clause, which may be either asserted as actualized or presented as possible, desired, etc. (Ammann and Van der Auwera 2004: 300-301).
- 2) Secondly, there are interclausal linkers encoding relations that project a particular reality status on the clauses they link. In these cases, it is the inherent semantics of the relation that implies a given reality value, and in languages lacking a dedicated connective for such relations, the use of irrealis markers is often the only available way of establishing the link. Two clauses linked in a disjunction by a marker equivalent to English *or*, for instance, are characterized by an irrealis status as a consequence of their being linked as alternatives. It is the interclausal relation of alternative that projects an irrealis status on the two clauses, which are presented as potential options, rather than facts (see Mauri 2008). Under this respect, disjunctive connectives are irrealis clause linkage markers, because they indicate the speaker’s attitude towards the set of linked propositions, and in particular, they encode the epistemic domain of doubt, not-knowing, hypothesis. In languages lacking a connective equivalent to ‘or’, the use of some other irrealis markers in each clause is obligatory in order to establish a disjunction between them (see ex. (3)). A number of other interclausal relations impose constraints on the reality status of the linked clauses. Conditional constructions, for instance, are usually classified as realis and irrealis, depending on whether the apodosis is presented as certain or simply imagined, possible (see Thompson and Longacre 1985: 190-198), and this is frequently reflected by a realis/irrealis marking in languages showing this distinction. Nonetheless, as Van den Berg acknowledges (1989: 59), the use of realis and irrealis markers in conditional constructions is not fully clear.

Despite the great interest of the interconnections between clause linkage and the coding of reality status, very few studies have until now paid attention to these phenomena. This paper will first describe the regular cross-linguistic variation attested in the coding of realis and irrealis at the clause linkage level. It will then be argued that the motivations underlying the attested connections between certain interclausal relations or clause linkage strategies and the expression of the realis vs. irrealis dimension are to be looked for in the diachronic paths that lead to the development of irrealis clause linkage markers.

Examples

(1) Jamul Tiipay (Hokan, Yuman; Miller 2001)

-ch ‘realis same subject’; *-m* ‘realis different subject’; *-chm* ‘realis different subject’;

-k ‘irrealis same-subject, dependent upon irrealis reference clause’; *-km* ‘irrealis different subject, dependent upon irrealis reference clause’.

- a. *nyaam lasdyees-m shuumaap-x*
really be.10:00-DS sleep.pl-IRR
‘It’s ten o’clock, let’s [go to] sleep.’ (Miller 2001: 229)
- b. *'-aa-k kwa'kuy-pu '-iny-x-s*
1-go-IRR.SS old.woman-DEM 1-give-IRR-EMPH
‘I will go and give it to the old woman.’ (Miller 2001: 230)

(2) Amele (Trans-New Guinea, Madang; Roberts 1990)

Ho bu-busal-eb ege q-oc nu
pig SIM-run.out-3sg.DS.IRR 1pl hit-INF HORT
‘Let us kill the pig as it runs out.’ (Roberts 1990: 372)

(3) Wari’ (Chapacura-Wanam; Everett and Kern 1997: 162)

--- the only way to convey an alternative between clauses is by marking them as possible, either through conditional particles (a) or through dubitative morphemes (b).

- a. *mo ta pa' ta' hwam ca,*
COND realis.future kill 1sg:realis.future fish 3sg.M
mo ta pa' ta' carawa ca
COND realis.future kill 1sg:realis.future animal 3sg.M
‘Either he will fish or he will hunt.’ (lit. ‘if he (says) “I will kill fish”, if he (says) “I will kill animals”.’)
- b. *'am 'e' ca 'am mi' pin ca*
perhaps live 3sg.M perhaps give complete 3sg.M
‘Either he will live or he will die.’ (lit. ‘perhaps he will live, perhaps he will die’)

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